

3-31-2009

Hilltopics: Volume 5, Issue 10

Hilltopics Staff

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholar.smu.edu/hilltopics>

Recommended Citation

Hilltopics Staff, "Hilltopics: Volume 5, Issue 10" (2009). *Hilltopics*. 91.
<https://scholar.smu.edu/hilltopics/91>

This document is brought to you for free and open access by the University Honors Program at SMU Scholar. It has been accepted for inclusion in Hilltopics by an authorized administrator of SMU Scholar. For more information, please visit <http://digitalrepository.smu.edu>.

HILLTOPICS

always 100% smu-written
www.smu.edu/univhonors/hilltopics

volume five, issue ten
week of march 31, 2009

The Unfortunate Return of Indulgences

by Amanda Oldham

Retro is in. What used to be old news is returning with a bang. More and more people have started wearing clothes that evoke the 70's. Recycling also seems to be at an all-time high. Wherever we go, we see some form of revitalization of an old era, whether it is a way to fight global warming or just a fun fad. Even the Catholic Church is doing it.

The Church has reinstated indulgences, a practice that dates back to the Middle Ages when the Catholic Church was the one and only church. According to Catholic doctrine, in exchange for prayers, devotions or pilgrimages known as "indulgences," a person's time spent in Purgatory will be shortened. These indulgences are seen as the kindness and mercy of God, granted when a person shows repentance for past sins in forms such as praying.

Most of us are too young to remember a time when indulgences were in practice. The only knowledge we have on the subject comes from our history books, which told us that indulgences were one of the numerous faults in Catholic doctrine that Martin Luther, who started the Reformation, had a problem with. The exact problem with indulgences? The Church began to sell them. All it took was a charitable donation and your

sins would be absolved instantly; a practice many found disgraceful. Rather than actually work to shorten your time in Purgatory with acts of repentance, a large sum, and no actual sense of being sorry, was the only thing necessary.

Granted, not everyone tried to buy their way into Heaven, but people still try to take the easy way out. Already, eBay has found itself with hundreds of auctions taking place over Indulgence Crosses, as if any sin can simply be erased depending on the size of your wallet. I thought greed was a sin in itself, yet somehow the system meant to pardon sins also creates them. I smell irony and it has been brewing for several centuries.

Irony aside, the Catholic Church did do away with indulgences back in the 1960's. So what current events could have driven them to bring back the black spot that to this day tarnishes their reputation?

While official sources say that the revival is just one part of a conservative resurgence in the Church, one has to wonder if this is yet another effect of the economy. True, the members of the clergy stand by what they say and claim it is the act of repentance that inherently absolves past sins; however, they also mention that

continued on page 3

INSIDE this issue

Technology: Josh Wood discusses the impact of the internet on the future of learning. page 2

Multicultural: Sanaz Talaifar breaks down the Persian New Year. page 4

Music: Thomas Dunlap reviews a recent performance by The Heartless Bastards. page 5

Social: Adrienne Yim encourages us all to take the time to write a letter. page 6

We welcome submissions from all members of the SMU community. Letters to the editor should be up to 300 words in response to a previously published article. Contributions should be articles of up to 300-600 words on any topic or in response to another article. Please email your submission to hilltopics@gmail.com by Wednesday at 7:00 PM to be included in the following week's publication. Special deadlines will be observed for breaking campus events. The opinions expressed in *Hilltopics* are those of the authors solely and do not reflect the beliefs of *Hilltopics* or any other entity. As such, *Hilltopics* does not publish anonymous articles.

Implications of the Information Age

by Josh Wood

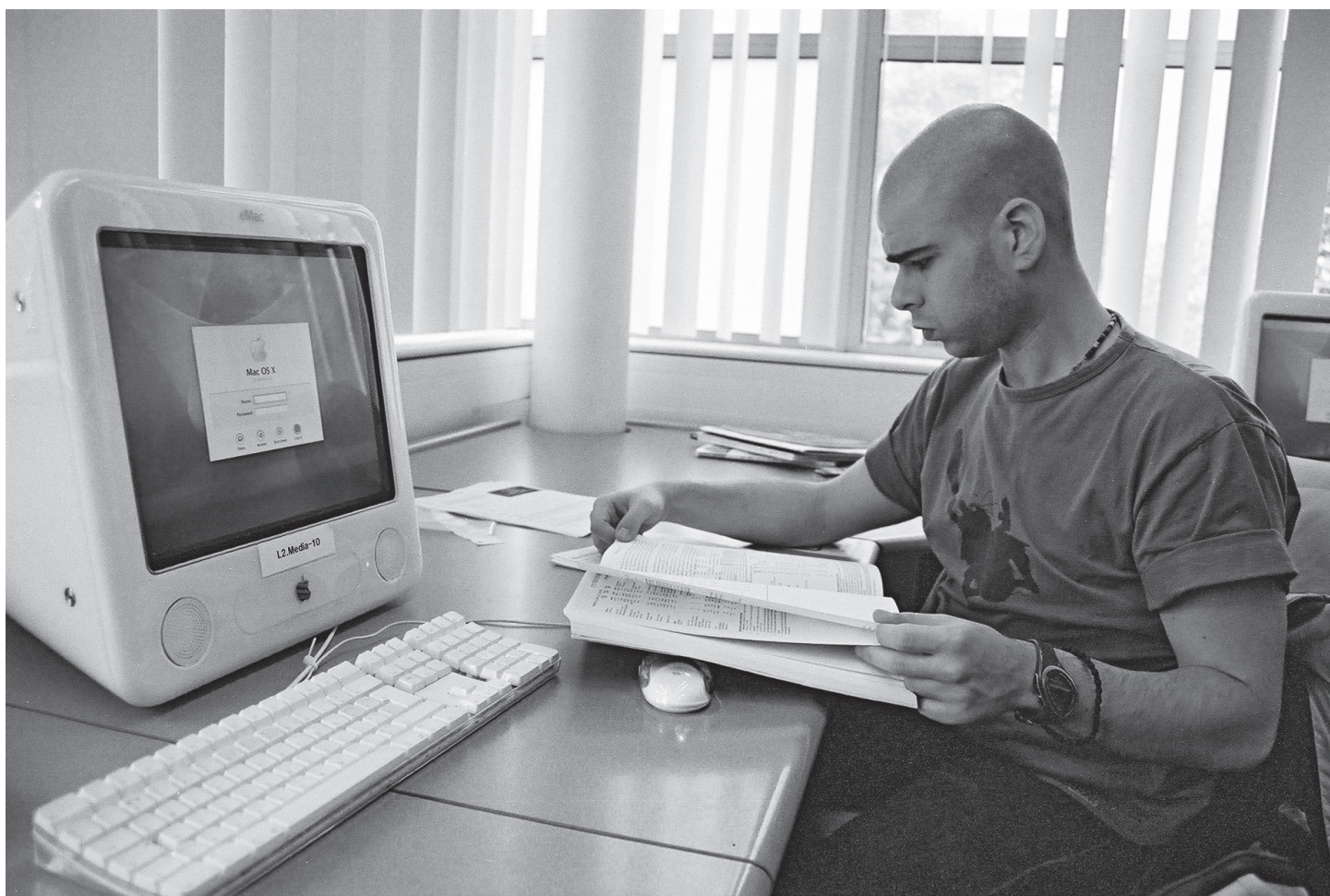
When a 21st century student decides to undertake a new research project, to satisfy either a class requirement or perhaps the rare personal desire for self-betterment, they will almost undoubtedly turn to the internet as their first source. Used either as a tool for choosing a particular topic to discuss, or as the actual source of reference for the research, the internet certainly delivers. As young adults who grew up with internet access, we often find ourselves unappreciative of this wealth of information and the overwhelming ease of access. Next time you get the chance, ask your parents how they wrote a research paper; I promise you the reply will contain some form of the phrase "back in my day, we went to the library, read books...you know, put forth actual effort" (or, perhaps if your parents use slightly more colorful language, something like "well we didn't have that damn internet, that's for sure"). Think about a few more generations ago. Or a few hundred years ago? A few thousand?

The influence of the internet (or more generally the impact of technology) on human thought is undeniably significant. Actually, man's learning capacity has historically been a function of information availability. Two thousand years ago, man knew little more than his surroundings; hu-

mans were clueless as to what an earthquake was, or where the weather came from, and the boundaries of thought were claustrophobic. Until five hundred years ago (Gutenberg's printing press) there was not an efficient means of spreading information. Eventually, advances in science and technology led to the Industrial Revolution, a surging middle class, education and books, and ultimately the resources for the dramatic expansion of independent thought. It is important to keep in mind that only a sliver of human history (less than two hundred years) can claim the existence of pervasive and affordable education.

Because of the ridiculous ease and speed of access of such a large volume of information that the internet provides (though you may find most of it trivial...or perhaps pornographic in nature), we have reached a turning point in how learning will take place and how human thought will develop. Traditionally, the learning process consisted of the basic foundation of facts, from which connections and analyses could be drawn.

"Now that I have researched the chronology of events of the American Civil War and can recite them by heart, I can



now begin to delve into the economic and military issues contained within."

The first portion of this method, the fact finding and hard memorization, is slowly being phased out by the proliferation of the internet and the wealth of information contained therein. With an internet connection, almost any fact or compilation of information can be summoned at will without delay. How many dimples are on the surface of a golf ball? What is the weather forecast for tomorrow? What is the score of the Mets game? With a reduced reliance on factual memorization and regurgitation, more time and effort can be spent on the deeper analyses of concepts, such as the connection of ideas or the implications of actions taken.

*"*click*...*click*...Here I have the chronology of events of the American Civil War, cross referenced with the political and economic history of trade between the North and Great Britain. Give me another minute or so, and I will find a correlation between the two, as well as the key players in the scenario."*

We should always keep in mind that this exponential trend is only going to continue. With initiatives such as Project Gutenberg, a free online library full of digital books, and the ever-expanding scholastic areas of the World Wide Web, a simple internet connection will be the only barrier between an individual and the wealth of the world's knowledge. There are many reasons to make the claim that "this is an exciting time to live"; but the notion that within the next few years the advancements in information technology will refine human thought is quite an exciting one.

Josh is a senior electrical engineering major and can be reached at jlwood@smu.edu

Indulgences

continued from page 1

charitable donations are taken along with the prayers, devotions and pilgrimages.

Other says that due to the indulgences' centuries-old history as a major part of the Church, much of the Church law has been written to include and explain the intricate web that encompasses the idea.

While tradition is usually not seen as a bad thing, when it comes to reinstating the practice of indulgences, others (like myself) have trouble predicting a good outcome.

Indulgences, though created at first with the best of intentions, fail to address the issues they cause, such as creating more sin.

Now, just as it was decades ago, people sell indulgences, inducing the perverse effect of breeding greed in the name of absolution. The original idea stems from the idea that if you are truly sorry for the things you have done wrong, and act in a way that proves you are sorry, your good actions in the name of faith will be rewarded. Unfortunately, people always find a way to get around actual work, preferring an easy out with little to no effort.

Yet the Catholic Church cannot be blamed for those perverse effects. Even though in the past the Church itself sold indulgences, that part of the practice has been left behind. The most likely cause seems to be people have forgotten that anything worth having takes more time and persistence than simply handing over cash. Perhaps it's time we all started remembering a little hard work and sweat isn't a bad thing after all.

Amanda is a freshman journalism and English major and can be reached at aoldham@smu.edu

Do you have an opinion about... politics, music, class, television, football, shopping, intramurals, fraternities, movies, tests, the Mavs, sex, restaurants, religion, sororities, driving, study abroad, Umphrey Lee, fashion, news, the war, parking, technology, magazines, bars, baseball, the weather, professors, the Mustang Band, dating, books, nightclubs, Texas, the Daily Campus, pets, club sports, or anything else ?

we're listening at hilltopics@gmail.com

The Persian New Year

by Sanaz Talaifar

Unbeknownst to most people, the Persian New Year took place on March 20th, the first day of spring and the day when the sun passed from the zodiac of Pisces and moved to Aries. At the moment when the sun was directly above the equator, shining light equally on the northern and southern hemispheres (the vernal equinox), Iranians everywhere recognized the first day of the year 1388 of the Iranian calendar. As one of the most important holidays of the year for Iranians around the world, friends and family gather to celebrate "Nowrooz," literally meaning "New Day," by visiting and partying. Rather than exchanging gifts, elders typically give the young people and children new money. Other traditions include jumping over fire the night before the last Wednesday of the year to bring good luck, extensive spring cleaning, and shopping for new clothes. A feast called a "haft-seen" (translated literally to mean "seven s's") is set in each



home, and includes seven items that begin with "s," each of which symbolizes something different such as rebirth, love, beauty, patience, etc. The thirteenth day after the New Year marks the end of the festivities, and people spend the day outdoors picnicking.

Nowrooz is celebrated in Afghanistan, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and other countries, but especially in Iran where it originated. President Obama used this Persian New Year as an opportunity to address both Iranians as well as the Iranian government in a short video message. He wished all a happy new year, and also signified that it was time to change the disharmonious relations between Iran and the United States that have perpetuated since the Iranian hostage crisis when Islamist students held U.S. diplomats in the American embassy for 444 days during the Iranian Islamic Revolution. (The U.S. has not had an embassy in Iran since.) He indicated that it was time for Iran to take its place in the world, but that this influence would come with significant responsibilities,

probably an allusion to Iran's nuclear ambitions and funding of Iraqi militant groups. The Iranian government, not always overly enthusiastic about Nowrooz because its roots are Zoroastrian and not Islamic, responded that Obama's actions will be more important than his words.

Regardless of the Iranian government's opinion of the message, it is highly likely that Iranian-Americans feel less ignored and less demonized as a result of Obama's New Year's wishes. House Resolution 267, introduced by Representative

Michael Honda (D-CA), "recognizing the cultural and historical significance of Nowrooz and wishing Iranian Americans and the people of Iran a prosperous New Year," is an extension of this newfound acknowledgment and appreciation of Persian culture by those in Washington. This seems to be a departure from former President Bush's rhetoric referring to

Iran as one of the countries, in addition to Iraq and North Korea, compromising the "axis of evil." While some may prefer Bush's more aggressive tactics in dealing with the rebellious Iranian government, it cannot be denied that Iranians living in this country and around the world may also feel alienated as a result. At a time when tensions between the United States and Iran only seem to escalate, and there exists a general antagonism towards the Middle East, a 2003 study by the MIT Iranian Studies Group stated that the 2000 Census report that 338,266 people of Iranian ancestry reside in the United States "may be serious underestimation of the actual population due to adverse perceptions of Iranian-Americans on claiming Iranian ancestry." Perhaps this Persian New Year will mark the beginning of a new era in United-States and Iranian affairs and what it means to be an Iranian-American.

Sanaz is a freshman and can be reached at stalaifar@smu.edu

The Heartless Bastards: A Live Review



There are some bands out there where any discussion about the merits of said band will lead to an inevitable point where the pro-band position holder will have to a) make some sort of concession and b) explain to you a singular aspect that represents what you “should be” listening for.

Live, Heartless Bastards are probably one of these bands and front-woman Erika Wennerstrom is that aspect. Wennerstrom is clearly the center of Heartless Bastards. She is the only Bastard to have maintained a presence on every release and it is her vocals that hold their live show together and keep Heartless Bastards from merely being a solid bar band. Every instrumental decision that Heartless Bastards makes as a band should be made in consideration of how it relates to Wennerstrom’s sturdy, blues-built voice. They’d have plenty of options, as she sounds terrific whether she’s skimming the surface of a minimal piano melody or crushing a chorus. Wennerstrom has one of those voices that sounds worn in, which is the key to her success as a songwriter. She’s someone you could accept simple truisms from, and judging by the way I saw a grown woman walk away from the stage clutching her notebook to her chest, people do. It’s this quality that made me relish the moments where the Bastards really showed their blues or country leanings and stripped away some of their straightforward rock sound.

It’s necessary to draw the distinction between the Bastard’s live show and their latest album *The Mountain*. If this were a live review circa ‘06 this would probably be much less important, but The Bastards have taken steps to expand their sound on their most recent album. In the case of *The Mountain*, their increased sonic ambition manifests itself in more elaborate and varied instrumentation, from violins, to the banjo, mandolin and steel guitar, which is all well and good in the studio but can be troublesome when it comes to converting the material to a road friendly form. Considering the burden of reconstructing that sound in a live setting, Heartless Bastards did a commendable job choosing older material that predicted *The Mountain*, like “Into The Open” off *All This Time* with it’s recurring piano refrain and confident

by Thomas Dunlap

instrumental finish or one of their earliest and best straight forward stompers “Swamp Song” where the band steps out of it’s safer interpretation of support to give Wennerstrom’s voice something to work against. However, I would have liked to see more of the simpler acoustic and bluesier numbers like “Could Be So Happy” and “Hold Your Head Up High” which showcased Wennerstrom’s voice and put the louder selections in perspective, building her position as an approachable and engaging figure.

As it was, the Bastards were generally successful in mitigating the risk of falling into a mid-tempo supportive rut, with only a few minor mis-steps like “Nothing Seems the Same” in which Wennerstrom sat out about half of the six-ish minute number and left the band to their own devices for what was clearly intended to be a bombastic, drum-kit-smashing finish. I’m not sure if even Wennerstrom’s voice could have saved what ended up being a wholly uninteresting two minute chord mash, but I don’t understand what logic prevented them from trying.

Ultimately Heartless Bastards gave the solid performance that anyone would expect from them based on their previous history, but in light of their recent advances I couldn’t help but feel like this show was something of a step backwards for them with hints of the more dynamic band they could be. They’ve shown they have the tools, they just need to figure out how to pack them all in the bus.

Thomas is a senior English major and can be reached at whatscene@gmail.com

The Lost Art of Writing

by Adrienne Yim



In this day and age, we are more connected than ever thanks to the effects of globalization and the technological advances of the latter half of the twenty-first century. And what a relief that is! Who among us can deny the joys of reconnecting with long-lost friends with whom communication became difficult because of their relocation to different countries? Before the widespread use of instant messaging programs, the rising popularity of email, and the invention of social networking sites, such as Facebook and Myspace, there were only two ways to stay in touch with loved ones and friends who lived far away: phone calls and letters. These two methods of communication satisfied our predecessors, so why did someone feel the need to invent new ways for staying in touch? One answer is expediency. Letters take a while to write; after all, one has to choose the right color of pen ink, pick out the stationery, and dig through a desk drawer to find those cute Hello Kitty stickers to put on the envelope...maybe that's just me. In any case, the point that I'm trying to make is that letters require a lot of time and ef-

fort, two things that many of us are unwilling to sacrifice for anything other than personal obligations. Hence, humans invented email, instant messaging, and eventually, the rabidly popular social networking sites. Each new technological advance, built on the last one by advertising the relative ease, convenience, and expediency with which one could keep in touch with others while not having to sacrifice any more than a few minutes or even a few seconds of precious time, an advantage that letter-writing could not boast. Plus, these inventions allowed for multitasking, a very handy ability for an increasingly on-the-go society. It's a sad situation, but our penchant for instant gratification and speed has contributed to the severe decline, if not total death, of letter-writing.

I don't mean to blame humanity and mutter darkly about the downside of the amazing technological progress in recent history. Last time I checked, "exhibit curmudgeonly behavior" wasn't high on my list of priorities. I realize that we as a society have sped up the pace of life and complicated it so much that we cannot help but to invent and improve

those inventions that help us cope with the dizzying rush of everyday life. (For some people, cell phones are a lifeline, whereas other people prize their laptops as highly as someone would prize an Aston Martin.) My lament concerns more of the loss of the ability to slow down and appreciate and do activities, no matter how old school, that require more than just a quick hit-and-run through any electronic means. Who doesn't like to receive mail the old-fashioned way? I sure do. There's just something exhilarating about opening the mailbox and seeing a handwritten envelope sitting there instead of the usual junk mail. Receiving and opening handwritten letters feels just like Christmas Day but only a hundred times better because of the rarity of getting snail mail. Of course, I appreciate any form of communication, whether by phone, Facebook, or email, I can get from my friends and family, especially those I have not seen in a while, but getting letters and postcards is the best feeling in the world. To me, it shows that my friend or family member put a lot of time, effort, and thought into keeping in touch with me, and seeing someone's handwriting makes it all the more personal and memorable.

I know there must be others who feel the same as I do in this technology-soaked world. While I definitely do not advocate a total return to writing letters as the sole form of communication, I think that people should make a concerted effort to sit down and really take the time to write a letter once in a while. A starting point: picture the face of a friend or family member with whom you have lost touch, haven't talked to in a while, whatever. Wouldn't it be a nice surprise to hear from you now? (And if someone asks you why you are writing a letter, you can tell them about your sincere effort to revive the lost art of letter-writing...just kidding.)

Sincerely yours,

Adrienne

Adrienne Yim can be reached at ayim@smu.edu

Movie Review: Watchmen

by Ashley Howe



The more days that go by since I've seen this movie, the fonder my memories of it are. It should be no surprise, since it was from Zack Snyder, the director of 300, that this movie was very violent—in that uncomfortable, detailed way. However, looking back, it did keep the superheroes more legitimate and current. What keeps growing on me is the really interesting message of the movie. It has that probing moral depth in the end which leaves you asking—does old fashioned morality still apply? I had no knowledge of the graphic novel before this movie, but it was still very enjoyable. Also, the soundtrack couldn't have been better. It made excellent use of Bob Dylan's "The Times—They are A-Changin'."

Summary: ****Spoiler Alert****

The movie is set during the Cold War (with Nixon in his fifth term), and the doomsday clock is at 5 minutes to midnight, indicating an extremely high probability of nuclear war. The story of the Watchmen unfolds through a series of flashbacks. Once we get to know all of the remaining superheroes, we gradually begin to see their very human weaknesses. In the midst of all this, the world pleads with them to do something to prevent a nuclear war. Ultimately Adrian Veidt (aka Ozymandias, the smartest man in the world) carries out his master plan to drop atomic bombs on several major cities around the world and kill millions, instead of letting billions die in all-out nuclear war. He frames his fellow superhero, Dr. Manhattan, to take the blame. As Russia and the United States immediately begin to work together to rebuild their nations, the other superheroes realize that the times are too complex to fight crime the way they used to. They ultimately come to the consensus that Veidt did the right thing.

Ashley is an earth science and accounting major and can be reached at amhowe@smu.edu



SMU Football
Red vs. Blue Scrimmage
Saturday, April 25, 2009
1:00 PM
Gerald Ford Stadium



Thumbs up:

- The end of Student Senate elections, and the subsequent inundation of campaign signs across campus
- The NCAA tournament is coming to an end; now office productivity can resume
- Earth Day is coming...respect her, or else.



Thumbs down:

- Trying to find summer jobs in the current economic climate
- The proliferation of 'Twitter'ized words (i.e. Twitterific)
- Tuition increases for next school year

Upcoming Events:

- | | |
|----------|--|
| April 1 | Student Lobbyist
Training
7:00-8:00 pm
HT Promenades A, B |
| April 3 | Sing Song 2009
McFarlin Auditorium |
| April 18 | Art of Darfur
7:00 -9:30 pm
Meadows School of the Arts |

HilltopicsStaff

Cody Meador: Editor-in-Chief
 Ashley Howe: Managing Editor
 Thomas Dunlap & Josh Wood: Graphics Editors
 Beth Anderson: Copy Editor
 Amanda Oldham: Copy Editor
 James Justinic: Webmaster
 Adrienne Yim: Business Manager
 Sanaz Talaifar: Distribution Manager

Hilltopics is published every other Tuesday. It is sponsored by the University Honors Program.

SMU Totally Fictitious Fact:

SMU's yearly landscaping budget surpasses the GDP of some developing third world contries.

